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Spouse Battlemind Training Helping your Family Thrive in the Military



Spouse Battlemind

Spouse Battlemind is the Spouse's ability to face deployments with resilience and strength, allowing easier separations and smoother reunions. Key components include:

- Independence
 - The capability of accomplishing all essential functions, alone if necessary, creating an Army Centric Family.
- Resiliency
 - The ability to overcome setbacks and obstacles; maintain positive thoughts during times of adversity.

Deployments and separations can have a positive impact on you and your family. However, these strengths may lead to conflicts.



Battlemind Training for Soldiers

- **Soldier Battlemind** is the Soldier's inner strength to face fear and adversity in combat with courage.

Buddies (cohesion) vs. Withdrawal

Accountability vs. Controlling Behavior

Targeted vs. Inappropriate Aggression

Tactical Awareness vs. Hypervigilance

Lethally Armed vs. "Locked and Loaded" at home

Emotional Control vs. Detachment

Mission and OPSEC vs. Secretiveness

Individual Responsibility vs. Guilt

Non-Defensive (combat) vs. Aggressive Driving

Discipline and Ordering vs. Conflict

- Battlemind skills help Soldiers survive in combat but may lead to problems if they are not adapted for back home.



Battlemind Training for **Spouses**

Working on this set of Battlemind skills throughout the military deployment cycle will help you increase your family's resiliency.

- B**uddies (Social Support)
- A**dding/Subtracting Family Roles
- T**aking Control (Independence)
- T**alking it Out
- L**oyalty and Commitment
- E**motional Control
- M**ental Health and Readiness
- I**ndividual Responsibility
- N**avigating the Army System
- D**enial of Self (Self-Sacrifice)



Buddies (Social Support)

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In Combat, Soldiers: Often make strong ties with their fellow Soldiers.

At Home, Spouses: May develop new friends by becoming more involved in the military community and social groups.

Potential Conflicts: Soldiers may want to spend more time with their buddies than their Spouses. Your new friends and activities were developed without the Soldier; this may be seen as a threat.



Buddies (Social Support)

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Talk with your Soldier about how much time is OK to spend with your new friends. Introduce your new friends to the Soldier; don't hide new friendships.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Talk with your Spouse about how much time is OK to spend with your buddies. Respect, and if possible, become involved in, your Spouse's new interests and friendships. Appreciate those who help your Spouse in your absence.



Adding/Subtracting Family

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Roles

In Combat, Soldiers: Are removed from the daily lives of their families and family events (e.g., births, graduations, birthdays, etc.).

At Home, Spouses: Function alone or as a single parent, making household decisions that might otherwise have been shared.

Potential Conflicts: You or your children might resist your Soldier's return to authority as a parent. Your Soldier may feel left out and fail to take up an active role in family decisions.



Adding/Subtracting Family

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Roles

Actions Spouse Can Take: Keep the Soldier involved with your family; encourage children to send pictures, e-mail, etc. Identify ways to allow your Soldier to resume family roles, despite possible resistance from your kids. Share day-to-day decisions and responsibilities upon reunion.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Your family develops new routines while you are away that don't include you. Don't let these changes cause you to withdraw from family roles. Once you return, resume an active role. But don't force it too fast, too soon.



Taking Control (Independence)

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In Combat, Soldiers: Maintain control of their weapons and gear in order to survive.

At Home, Spouses: Do what needs to be done to maintain control of your household.

Potential Reunion Conflicts: You may feel like you need to give up doing the things you enjoyed during separations which may lead to resentment. Your Soldier may have different priorities for how the family's time and money should be used. Your Soldier may feel left out due to your increased independence.



Taking Control (Independence)

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Negotiate priorities and incorporate those of your Soldier. Although you need to be able to function on your own, keep in mind that your family is a team.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Respect and appreciate your Spouse's independence. Trust and encourage your Spouse to set priorities. Establish lanes of responsibility; it is OK for your Spouse to be in the lead.



Talking it Out

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In Combat, Soldiers: Only share mission-specific information with those who need to know.

At Home, Spouses: Make sacrifices in order for your Soldier to focus solely on completing deployment missions. Often you do not know everything that is affecting your Soldier.

Potential Reunion Conflicts: You may immediately want to know all about your Soldier's deployment, but your Soldier may not be ready to tell.



Talking it Out

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Your Soldier may not share every deployment experience with you. Let the story come out with time, and in his/her own words. Deployment is difficult for both Soldiers and Spouses; talk it out to understand both sides of the story.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Don't expect your Spouse to understand what it is like in a combat environment unless you share your experiences. Recognize that your Spouse has a deployment story to share as well.



Loyalty and Commitment

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In Combat, Soldiers: Need to know their Spouses will remain loyal and be there for them when they return.

At Home, Spouses: Have the difficult responsibility of maintaining a long distance relationship and remaining committed while your Soldier is away.

Potential Reunion Conflicts: If you did well during a separation, your Soldier may take your commitment for granted.



Loyalty and Commitment

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Avoid telling your Soldier you are fine alone, or that you can't handle another separation. Tell your Soldier how much you missed them, how you handled them being away and how happy you are for them to be back.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Tell your Spouse you love and appreciate her/him. Avoid the "My Spouse will take care of it" mentality by becoming involved; ask how you can help. Practice saying, "Thanks"! Say it often.



Emotional Control

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In Combat, Soldiers: Control their emotions in order to be successful in missions; this emotional disengagement can quickly become second nature.

At Home, Spouses: Manage your well-being without the daily emotional support of your Soldier.

Potential Reunion Conflicts: Re-establishing emotional and physical intimacy might not meet your or your Soldier's expectations. Your Soldier may only express anger or detachment.



Emotional Control

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Be patient. Emotional detachment is not uncommon in Soldiers preparing for or returning from combat. It will take time and effort from you and your Soldier to re-establish emotional and physical bonds.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Appreciate the difference between sex and emotional intimacy. Put in the time and work to reconnect physically and emotionally with your Spouse. Practice the full range of emotions (don't limit yourself to anger or detachment) in a variety of ways (email, phone, pictures, etc.).



Mental Health and Readiness

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In Combat, Soldiers: Are constantly alert of their surroundings in order to react immediately to threats.

At Home, Spouses: Make sure your mental well-being is maintained. Your family's mental health might be affected by your Soldier's mental health status

Potential Reunion Conflicts: Your Soldier may display behavior changes that worry you. Mental health efforts for the Soldier don't often reach out to Spouses or families. Your Soldier may not want help if it is needed.



Mental Health and Readiness

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Changes in your Soldier's behavior that are causing problems in your family need to be addressed. Realize that you might not be the person the Soldier will accept help from. Know what mental health resources are available for you and your family.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Recognize changes in yourself that might be signs you should get help; seek help if you need it. Accept help from others, especially your Spouse. Don't push away or lash out at those who are trying to help you. Don't try to avoid or self-treat problems with alcohol or illegal drugs.



Individual Responsibility

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In Combat, Soldiers: Make split-second decisions that can mean the difference between life and death.

At Home, Spouses: Establish effective routines and schedules for the children and family.

Potential Reunion Conflicts: Your Soldier may want to change the way you have been running the household.



Individual Responsibility

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Take into account your Soldier's preference about how the house is run. Be willing to compromise.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Small changes to a “family system” can have large effects. Don’t fix what’s working; ask how you can help. Let go of the little things. Understand that if you have children, they tend to like routine and predictability.



Navigating the Army System

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In Combat, Soldiers: Follow rules and regulations (i.e., ROEs).

At Home, Spouses: Navigate the Army environment, using the available Army resources and integrate into the army community.

Potential Reunion Conflicts: Spouses may be angry and resentful for having to deal with a complicated, bureaucratic organization (e.g., TRICARE, DEERS) and perceived lack of information from the unit.



Navigating the Army System

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Learn the Army System, don't wait for someone to tell you what to do. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Be patient, it takes time.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Share all information you have about the Army services with your Spouse. Show your Spouse the locations of these services. Help your Spouse navigate the system.



Denial of Self (Self-Sacrifice)

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In Combat, Soldiers: Literally put their lives on the line for their fellow Soldiers in service of their country.

At Home, Spouses: Often sacrifice by putting the needs of the family before your own.

Potential Reunion Conflicts: Either of you may feel that you are sacrificing a lot and you are not being appreciated.



Denial of Self (Self-Sacrifice)

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Actions Spouse Can Take: Tell your Soldier that you appreciate his/her sacrifice and that you know that being a Soldier is difficult.

Actions Soldier Can Take: Be aware that you are not the only one making a sacrifice. Show your Spouse how much you appreciate their hard work and encourage them to pursue some of their own interests.



Family and Mental Health Resources

- Military or Civilian Chaplain
- Mental/Behavioral Health Services
- Army/Military One Source: 1-800-342-9647
 - or www.ArmyOneSource.com
- Army Community Services (ACS)
- Social Work Services (SWS)
- Family Advocacy Program (FAP)
- Child Youth Services (CYS)
- New Parent Support Program (NPSP)
- School Counselor



Point of Contact and Disclaimer

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This presentation contains a combination of research findings and recommendations, many of which are based on personal observations and experiences. Therefore, the opinions and views expressed here are those of the Land Combat Study Team, and should not be considered representing the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.



Adapting to Life Back Home

Normal Reactions for Spouses

- Increased moodiness and irritability.
- Feeling disappointed, let down or overwhelmed.
- Feeling lonely and confused.
- Becoming isolated (staying home more, ignoring friends, not participating in hobbies, etc.).



Adapting to Life Back Home

Cues Spouses Might Need Help

- Feeling depressed and down for several months.
- Repeated crying episodes for no apparent reason which don't get better over time.
- Feeling angry, tense, irritable and/or resentful most of the time.
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much for several months.
- Appetite changes.
- Not finding fun in things you used to enjoy.
- Turning to over-the-counter medications, illegal drugs or alcohol to cope.
- Consistently taking out frustrations on the kids.



Adapting to Life Back Home

Normal Soldier Combat Reactions and Symptoms

- Strong memories, nightmares or unpleasant thoughts after combat.
- Feeling numb, detached, or avoiding things that remind the Soldier of the war-zone.
- Being revved up, trouble sleeping, irritability and anger, easily startled.



Adapting to Life Back Home

Cues Soldiers Might Need Help

- Readjustment issues are intense and/or last more than a few months.
- Suicidal or homicidal thinking, intent, or actions.
- Excessive use of alcohol or other substances.
- Performance problems at work or at home.
- Distant from you or your children, talking of divorce or separation.
- Conflict, arguing, and hostility, aggressive driving.
- Feeling down or not able to enjoy life.
- You or the Soldier's supervisor or buddy thinks he/she needs help.



Adapting to Life Back Home

Normal Reactions for Children

- Reactions for children depend on the developmental stage that a child is in. Younger children will react differently than teenagers.
- Kids tend to show they are upset by being irritable and cranky rather than by being depressed.
- There may be emotional ups and downs following transitions.
- Kids may reject the parent who is/was absent and/or by being clingy or anxious.



Adapting to Life Back Home

Cues Your Children Might Need Help

- Look for CHANGES in how the child normally behaves and problems that don't go away for many weeks.
- Irritability and problems controlling his/her temper.
- Getting into fights, hitting, biting, and/or kicking.
- Having problems paying attention or sitting still.
- Withdrawing from friends and becoming a loner at school or home.
- Being unhappy, sad or depressed.
- Having academic problems that weren't there before.
- School recommends that your child sees a counselor.